

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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EAR MEMBER,

Four weeks ago in C.N.-L. No. 10 I outlined the variety of tasks that are necessary for the making of a better society, and made it clear that this was preliminary to getting down to specific concrete issues. I welcome the opportunity of being allowed to publish this week's Supplement. The subject with which it deals is so important that I am devoting this number exclusively to it. The paper has taken its present shape as the result of much private discussion among an influential group.

It is not written from a professedly Christian standpoint. But it raises three major issues which Christians ought to find highly exciting.

In the first place it asks us to make up our minds about the kind of society we want. The people of this country are convinced that the Nazi conception of life is tolerable. They have no taste for atheistic communism. But in regard to the positive aim to be set over against these their ideas are much more hazy. The paper insists that this question cannot be evaded.

We cannot have a society which binds men to one another in mutual responsibility without a specific common faith. There must be a basal agreement about what matters most. Modern society is disintegrating because in recent centuries men have been so excited about the new powers which science put into their hands that they had no time to think about values. We are now beginning to see that unless we make up our minds about these ultimate issues, society will collapse. The challenge of National-socialism and Communism will do good, if it compels us to ask ourselves what are the foundations of a true community.

The paper does not discuss the *content* of the specific common faith which society needs. It propounds the question as the one on which all else hinges. This thus opens a debate, the importance of which cannot be exaggerated.

Secondly, the paper suggests that the first step towards getting the right kind of society is to concentrate effort on the care and education of youth. This from the Christian point of view is the right approach. The proposed educational reforms will undoubtedly require far-reaching changes in the structure and institutions of present society. But in the transformation of society what lies nearest to the heart of Christians is the status, growth and welfare of persons and the kind of relations they have with one another. What men live by and what they live for is the central business of Christianity, and it is in the education of persons that the responsibilities of the family, the Church, the local community and the State are most closely intertwined.

Thirdly, the plea that there must be a comprehensive and adequate national programme of education; that there must be equalisation of educational opportunity; that children should be regarded as standing outside the conflict of interests and as all alike

deserving to be given a chance—what is all this but a plea for the fulfilment of Christ's commandment to love one's neighbour as oneself? What we all need to realise is that in modern society it is not possible to obey this commandment apart from collective action. In the early days of Christianity, and for long afterwards, the relations of persons were for the most part personal and direct. To-day individuals acting alone are powerless to meet many of the deepest human needs. The help that is wanted can be given only by social and political action. Till Christians awaken to this truth, and find the means of acting on it, their obedience to Christ's teaching will be partial and stunted, and the message of the Church must appear unreal.

It is no more possible in this letter than in the Supplement to discuss the content of education. The consideration of its Christian content must be reserved for later issues. I want now only to suggest that in these matters the Church has a *double concern*.

First it has to bear witness to certain indefeasible rights of man, and in particular the right of each individual to develop the capacities which God has given him. The denial of these rights is to do violence to the dignity of man as created in the image of God and called to live as His son. Why should the Churches leave it so largely to M. H. G. Wells to proclaim on the housetops truths that are inherent in the Christian faith? Readers of *Illustrated* will understand the point of this question. I shall return to it next week.

But equally the Church has to declare that man can fulfil the purpose of his life only by being true to his real nature. He is not a being who exists in isolation, with nothing to do but to unfold the infinite possibilities of his own personality. The humanist cult of personality which has had so large an influence on modern education is based on a false view of human nature. Man is essentially a social being, united both to God and to his fellow-men by bonds of obligation and responsibility. Only in the acknowledgment of these bonds can he find his true life. The Christian view, moreover, deals realistically with the fact that man is always disregarding the responsibilities and becoming self-centred, and that consequently his deepest need to be redeemed from his ego-centrism.

All these questions gain an enhanced importance from the fact that we are living in a world that is being pulled to pieces and remade. All values are in the melting-pot. The time will come when society, needing stability, will settle down under the sway of a new set of values. The opportunity of determining what those values will be will then have passed.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Oldham

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EDUCATING FOR A FREE SOCIETY

I.

The crisis of which this war is a symptom and a part is a challenge to men to show wisdom commensurate with their power. People are ceasing to believe that societies, whether national or international, are kept on any road of "progress" by any automatic "harmony of interests." Few suppose now that what is economically profitable must needs be socially convenient or morally right. Few suppose now that the benefit of one class or interest or nation works necessarily for the benefit of all. Therefore, the new society, of which both politicians and common men are beginning to talk, will not come of itself. It must be created by the wisdom, the courage, and the self-sacrifice of men.

Thus, the war of ideas is not a mere episode in hostilities. Hostilities are an episode in a war of ideas. People to-day are challenged to choose within the limits of the possible the conditions of life which they most want to preserve or create; and in this process education has a double part to play. It can clarify the choice, and can enlarge or narrow the limits of the possible.

Education cannot fail to reflect each generation's conception of what matters most and to imply its ideal for the future—however negative, however incoherent that conception or ideal may be. What is being done in education reflects the qualities and limitations of to-day. What is being attempted foreshadows the society of tomorrow. Education is social philosophy in action, and as such it can express better than words the choice to which each generation is willing to commit itself.

At the same time, to an extent at present unknown, education determines what kind of a society it shall be possible to create. For a society is made of men and women; and what they are sets a limit to what it can be. Totalitarian rulers train the young to worship and serve the State. It is no less positive and far more difficult a task to make them fit to form a free society. For a free society cannot be created or maintained merely by political institutions. Its character depends on the character of its citizens.

A free society has a particular kind of unity—namely, the unity of people who have developed a sense of responsibility for each other and for the future. It is this alone which can make them co-operate spontaneously on all levels of activity in getting done matters of common concern; and if self-government means less than that, it is bound to fail. To make such self-government effective makes ever greater demands on ordinary men and women. Issues get harder to understand; pressure gets harder

to resist. A free society needs citizens who become more and more sensitive to truth and more and more impervious to lies—increasingly informed and intelligent increasingly independent and courageous. But even more than intelligence and independence it demands of them a common faith.

For a society is only free in so far as it is a fellowship in which each can find the opportunities for living his own life. These opportunities are freedom. If men are to find their individual freedom in a common society without enslaving or stultifying each other or themselves, their respective ideas of what matters most must be consistent in essentials. They must know what "opportunities" they value most—for themselves and for each other—and they must be prepared to make sacrifice to create them. Freedom is specific, and it is not possible without a *specific* common faith in *specific* human values. The quality of freedom in a society is to be tested not by asking, "How much freedom does it ensure?" but rather, "For what does it ensure freedom—and for whom?"

Thus, education, if it be given a meaning as wide and as deep as it deserves cannot escape—and should not seek to escape—the responsibility of playing a central part both in shaping the ideals of to-day and in making the community of to-morrow. It is not the State's gift, but the State's need. It is the most conscious part of the living tradition which links the future to the past. It is the most conscious channel through which each individual receives his share of the common inheritance and his opportunity to add to it. It can never be more important than at this time and for this generation, whose principal task, in an epoch of fundamental change must be to plant in to-morrow the seed which is falling from the already withered order of yesterday.

This is a concrete task. It concerns not education generally, but education in Britain to-day. It involves solving a complex of specific problems which are embedded in history and locality. The purpose of this paper is to state—not to answer—these educational issues, in the belief that it is essential to face them now; and that in the course of facing them honestly even wider issues may be raised and decided aright.

II.

There are three major educational issues in this country to-day. They may be expressed as three separate but related purposes—to equalise the educational opportunity; to extend the educational period; and to deepen the educational purpose.

TO EQUALISE THE OPPORTUNITY

Wealth carries a greater privilege and poverty a greater handicap in the educational system of England than in the systems of most civilised countries. The public schools remain the preserve of the rich and produce a recognisable class which gets a better chance both socially and economically than the rest. The quality of education

not necessarily better than is given in the best secondary schools, but it is given to different age group, in a different environment and with a somewhat different purpose. The public schools represent a more or less conscious attempt to produce a "governing class" from an exceedingly limited section of the community. They have called into being private preparatory schools through which most entrants to the public schools pass, so that the process of segregation begins early and covers usually the whole educational period. The Universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, are to a great and increasing degree open to ability irrespective of money, but this cannot have its full effect so long as the streams of privileged and unprivileged unite there for the first time. If a public school education has the peculiar quality which is claimed for it, it should be made available to all those who can profit by it best, irrespective of wealth—and this on the ground of national interest, no less than of social justice. This would involve linking the public schools to the national system of education without either impairing their individuality or lowering their standards. Indeed, to make available to them more and better material should enable them to develop their individuality and to raise their standards.

So long as the "governing" and professional classes are drawn predominantly from families above a certain income level they are unlikely to understand—and still less likely to be enriched by—the mental and social attitudes which belong to life on the other levels. Moreover, they are likely to expect their own activities to place them on the same income level as that from which they came. Both these limitations are handicaps to the classes concerned and weaknesses in the social order of which they form part. It is necessary and right that these classes should have a special training and should develop professional standards; it is neither necessary nor right that the professional standards which they develop should be reinforced and limited by the mental attitudes of particular wealth-groups or social-groups.

TO EXTEND THE PERIOD

However adequately the first issue be met, educational equality will remain an illusion so long as 85 per cent. of boys and girls begin whole-time wage-earning at fourteen, as they at present do. There is an irresistible case both for raising the school age to fifteen (and ultimately to sixteen) and for extending part-time education until eighteen. Parliament gave definite shape and blessing to the former in the Act of 1936 (in spite of its "exemptions") and to the latter in the Act of 1918. The former was suspended without ever having operated, owing to the situation created by the war at the moment when it was about to come into force; the latter (with a single honourable but small exception) has never been brought into operation. The long delay, like the exemptions in the 1936 Act, has been due in part to the resistance of two private interests—employers who fear dislocation of the "juvenile labour market" and parents who fear loss of potential family income. To a greater extent, so far at least as the 1918 Act is concerned, it has been due to the absence, both in and outside Parliament, of an attitude of mind which counted it worth the cost in effort, in inconvenience and, most of all, in money.

The primary purpose of this extension should not be to protect the young for as long as possible from conditions of life and livelihood which adults have an equal right to resent; the remedy for that lies in another field. Nor should its purpose be to produce more clerks than any society wants. Its primary purpose should be to maintain educational direction and control throughout the adolescent years and thus to make the whole period of those years a planned transition from childhood to manhood, citizenship and work; and its character should express that purpose.

The dawning consciousness of this outrageous gap between fourteen and eighteen conceals the fact that at eighteen another educational field opens which is at present even more neglected. The educational movement which was the principal agent in revolutionising the social, economic and political life of Denmark during the latter part of the last century addressed itself deliberately—and successfully—to young men of eighteen years and upwards, because its founder thought it useless to enter on the final stages of "education for life" at any earlier age. Nor should an earlier "gap" be forgotten—the gap before "education" begins which the nursery school is learning how to fill. Education has no boundaries. It will not be contained within particular age-groups, or ministries or categories of thought. It overflows from the mental into the physical and the spiritual. It is concerned with politics and with midwifery, with philosophy and with drains, with religion and with milk supply. The unity which it needs can never be imparted by institutions, but only by an underlying unity of vision, of purpose and of faith.

TO DEEPEN THE PURPOSE

When education became universal, traditions which were largely of aristocratic and clerical origin were carried over into a democratic world, at a time when that world was approaching a time of swift and fundamental change. These traditions have not yet been unified and enlivened by an adequately clear and widespread vision of the task which education has to play in a self-governing State to-day. The result is a lack of balance which is partly recognised, but still far from corrected.

The Critical Tradition.—The public schools have preserved the traditional supremacy of an education based on critical appreciation of the written word, and this has powerfully influenced both the secondary schools and the public mind. The tradition is of great and permanent value. None the less, if not properly balanced, it begets a bookish attitude which produces "critics instead of creators." This tradition still hinders the development of a new philosophy of education which is overdue—a philosophy fit to inspire the education not merely of a class but of a people.

The instructional tradition. Education—especially post-primary education—inherits a tradition accustomed to confine its central field to the kind of training which can be imparted by instruction and tested by written examinations. Hence physical training, recreational training, character training, in so much as they have to be gained by experience and in action, still tend to be allotted a place on the periphery of the field. Both popular and scientific thought, however, are learning to regard

the human creature as a whole and to demand that it be trained as a whole, in body, mind and character, for manhood, for citizenship and for work. This demands a new emphasis, both on provision for the physical needs of the young and on social training and new standards which will be a better measure of human quality.

The individualist tradition. The ideal of individual teaching (remote as it may be) leading up to the individual test of the written examination, tends to divert attention from the less measurable but equally real value in education of collective activities. Camps, expeditions and collective work can immensely extend a field which has hitherto been little developed except by team games. Most important, however, is the task of making the school itself in all its aspects a "collective activity," participation in which is itself "education for life." Every school which succeeds in this tends to the proof that "collective activities" do not mean regimentation. Initiative and co-operation, no less than self-surrender are the elements of effective discipline.

Along all the lines which these criticisms indicate, swift development is going on. Taken together, however, they express a demand that education shall aim higher and achieve more than anything which is within its reach to-day. And this demand, if it is not to be self-defeating must be met without introducing an institutional code disguised as a set of principles, or degrading schools into bureaux for the issue of centrally approved instruction. The decentralised British system, with all its inequalities and inconsistencies, can produce schools which are individual and alive; and this capacity must by all means be stimulated rather than impeded, if the schools are to produce new generations fit to make a self-governing society function. What is needed is not new principles or even new machinery, but a new awareness of real values and a new willingness to make the efforts and sacrifices by which they can be realised.

III.

These three issues are controversial.

The first issue raises controversies in the political field. The public schools are part of a system which defends the predominance of the propertied. Consciously or unconsciously, many of the privileged are unwilling to see their safeguards weakened.

The second issue raises economic controversies. The extension of whole-time education to fifteen and part-time education to eighteen (both of which must be universal in order to avoid distinctions between areas and individuals) will substantially increase the cost of education, both for capital equipment and for maintenance. It will mean far-reaching adjustment in the recruitment and use of workers in industry. It will mean a sacrifice by parents of the money which their children might be earning. It must involve either introducing family allowances or greatly extending maintenance allowances. All these issues raise in one form or another the question—what is education worth?

The third issue raises still wider controversies. What should be the content of education and what its object? What should be the place and scope of religious teaching? Apart from religious teaching, how can the schools best contribute to the

training of character? What kind of activities should make up part-time training the young during the transition period? What is the educative value of collective activities and in what sort of communities should children experience them? The issues are much wider than the domain of education. They go to the root of the question—for what are we trying to educate? What kind of people do we want to produce? In what kind of world do we expect them to live? What are the essentials of that specific common faith which alone can make it possible for human persons to live significant lives in and through a coherent society?

It is time to face these controversies, for education more than any other social activity can shape the future, and Britain is bound to be faced within a few years with the need for radical re-shaping. It is hard for those who live in it to see the full oddity of its social structure. On the one hand, there grow increasingly powerful and autonomous vested interests, which in their relations with the Government become more and more reminiscent of feudal barons. On the other hand, there develops an urban proletariat without roots in the past, without a share in the present, and without hope for the future. Between these extremes lies the bulk of the population, highly stratified in classes and divided economically into categories, some of which are as rigid as Hindoo castes. The range of incomes is fantastically wide. Power resides with an industrial plutocracy, which has inherited and still preserves some of the mentality and some of the institutions of feudalism. Its only rival is a labour party which has been content for long to take an ever higher price for its continued acquiescence in the pace set by the governing class. Its principal cement hitherto has been the dividend from the golden age which is abruptly passing away. This is the society which is to be disrupted physically by evacuation and mobilisation, and mentally by a war of ideas; and then subjected to a sudden drop in its standard of living, which cannot by any means be confined to the rich. The result must be profound change. Is the changed Britain which will emerge to be what the battle of rival interests may make it, or is it to be what a common purpose would have it be? The answer may depend on how these educational issues are faced now. For it is in facing them that a coherent purpose can most swiftly be developed; and without such a purpose the forces which are remaking Britain must proceed blindly, undirected by intelligence or faith.

To deal with those issues in wartime is difficult. Of the major difficulties money is probably the least, for education is not proportionate to national wealth. It depends rather on what people have learned to value most. It has few worse enemies than commercialism. War reveals the value of *men*—not as “hands,” not as “consumers,” but as conscious agents on whose courage and endurance and skill everything ultimately depends; and thus throws an unexpected light on what education ultimately for—namely, to develop those qualities of body, mind, and character by which, in war or peace alike, men can triumph over circumstance.

War presents opportunities as well as difficulties. Hence two policies are needed—one long-term and complete, seeing the three issues in relation to each other and the steps needed for the realisation of each; the other opportunist and fragmentary, ready to seize the opportunities which the war presents, to establish bits of the long-term

an, even in embryo and out of due order; no less ready to prevent those opportunities from being misused in the service of some temporary need.

Every dislocation of the war should be examined to distinguish the element of opportunity which it holds. In the public schools, declining numbers and the upheavals of war are likely to quicken the already growing vision of the new opportunities and responsibilities of their inheritance. Evacuated schools have a chance of some activities which are not available in peace time. Children in evacuated areas, lacking their own schools, are an opportunity for experiment which might hold some element of value. Boys between eighteen and twenty, thrown out of work by the approach of mobilisation or deterred from entering the Universities for the same reason, clamour for occupation. Hundreds of thousands of young men in the Army and home defence services have little or nothing to do. In due course the fighting forces will be facing the problem of "re-creating" men who are stalled or shaken by the strains of war. In every one of these cases can be regarded not merely as a disaster to be palliated, but as an opportunity to be taken.

It is not the purpose of this paper to make any contribution either to the long-term or to the short-term policy. Its purpose is simply to state the problem and its implications. To do anything adequate to the situation will require activity in at least five fields.

- (a) The purpose of education must be re-examined in relation to the changing social and political order. This is a task for all who share the same social ideal.
- (b) The policies must be worked out in accordance with the needs and opportunities of to-day. This is primarily a task for educationists.
- (c) Public interest and support must be mobilised, both generally and in particular among the leaders of the business world and of organised labour. This is a task for a non-political agency, formed if necessary for the purpose.
- (d) Parliamentary support must be won. An all-party committee of members interested in the educational issues here stated should if possible be formed.
- (e) The policies must be carried into effect. This involves the lively activation of local educational authorities through the Ministry of Education and probably action by other Ministries.

Mere planning for "after the war" is not enough. In the first place, the transition from war to peace may be even longer than the transition from peace to war—already many months old—is proving itself to be. In the second place, "after the war" will be too late. The moment following a war—at all events, the moment following a successful war—is always a psychological trough, without vision or energy. The beginning must be made now, while habits are shaken and the economic system accustomed to take orders based on national need; now, while a common purpose seems something worth making; now, while we are trying to describe to each other and to ourselves the kind of society which we claim to be fighting to create.

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